
West Sussex County Council's Armed Forces Covenant 2022/23

Background

- 1** West Sussex County Council first signed the Covenant in 2012 as its commitment to the armed forces community. The Council achieved Gold Award status in August 2020 on the South East Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Association (SERFCA) Employer Award Programme.
- 2** The County Council hosts the West Sussex Civilian Military Partnership Board, a stakeholder group including borough and district councils, armed forces organisations, charities and business and employment representatives. It works to improve service provision for the armed forces community. The Board is chaired by Cllr Pendleton, the County Council's Armed Forces Champion.
- 3** The County Council agreed an Armed Forces Strategy in March 2021, committing to developing its support further in a joined-up approach across Council services and held an inaugural partnership conference in June 2023.

Update

- 4** An officer Armed Forces Panel drives the delivery of the Strategy ambitions and seeks to ensure that the Council provides a consistent, high-quality service for the armed forces family. The Panel is chaired by Emily King, Assistant Director (Communities) and comprises staff veterans and forces family members, working alongside representatives from Human Resources & Organisational Development and Communications & Engagement and colleagues from customer-facing services. The focus of the Panel has been to further develop connections both internally across Directorates and Services as well as with external partners supporting the wider armed forces family and veterans. Activity over the past year has included a review of the current website content and developing a comprehensive suite of new web pages which will undergo user testing before going live. Following the scheduled release of census results the Data & Insight Team have assisted the Armed Forces Panel to develop a stronger understanding of the distribution and demography of veterans, reservists and those currently serving across West Sussex.
- 5** The Armed Forces Panel has sought to increase awareness across the wider organisation by promoting participation in events designed to generate interest and understanding elements of military training. The South-East Challenge Days hosted regularly by the Army at Longmoor Training Camp are increasingly popular with around 20 staff expected to attend the event on Friday, 13 October. This opportunity to take part in a series of team challenges delivered by the Army allows participants to develop teamwork and leadership skills, building individual self-awareness whilst taking part in fun, interactive activities that simulate an authentic training environment.
- 6** In June the County Council hosted an inaugural conference combining a development session for members of the West Sussex Civilian Military Partnership Board with an opportunity for a wider group of partnership organisation representatives to receive presentations on key themes and engage in discussion to develop a series of delivery priorities. The conference welcomed statutory partners and attendance from a diverse range of voluntary, community sector organisations who provide valuable support, friendship and signposting to those

currently serving, veterans and the wider forces family. A series of marketplace stands, and structured discussion sessions blended data and insight with the first-hand experiences illustrating the needs of individuals and families engaging with services/charities to formulate shared development ambitions. The Council will look to host a similar event next year to continue to strengthen the countywide partnership approach.

- 7** October will see the County Council participate in the Careers Transition Partnership job fair held annually in Southampton. This regional event routinely attracts more than 50 organisations actively looking to recruit individuals about to finish their military service and considering their employment options. Attendance at this event is part of a concerted effort to promote hard to recruit positions and showcase the diversity of roles available within the County Council. Such events are well attended by prospective Service leavers and direct engagement offers the chance to de-mystify local authority recruitment processes, share experiences and encourage applications which may provide a stepping-stone from military life and an opportunity to utilise knowledge, skills and experience in a new organisational setting. The Civilian Military Partnership Board has also increased its focus on workforce including exploring opportunities to attract spouses and family members into employment.
- 8** The Leader of the Council has raised the Armed Forces Covenant in his meetings with leaders of borough and district councils and, following the recent local elections, the Military Champion has started a programme of introductory meetings with newly nominated Champions from within each district and borough as they start their term of office.
- 9** The archives and library of the Royal Sussex Regiment are held at the County Council's Record Office and the Record Office is working with the Royal Sussex Regimental Association Trust and the Sussex Yeomanry Museum Trust to preserve and promote the military heritage of the county whilst exploring options to increase archive and display space.
- 10** The County Council has many positive links with other organisations and prides itself on strong partnership working. An example is the relationship with the University of Chichester who have now delivered three 12-week bridging courses to a total of 60 Afghan refugees, including some who worked in roles alongside British and allied armed forces. Students who pass the assignments are awarded 20 academic credits which can serve as a non-traditional and inclusive pathway to higher education or add value to the student's resume. This innovative course provides participants with the knowledge and skills to access higher education and was originally designed for British service veterans but has been expanded to support those awaiting permanent resettlement.

Moving Forward

- 11** The officer Panel referred to in paragraph 4 will continue to review the content of training material for frontline customer-facing staff within the County Council to ensure it reflects the current policy position on the Armed Forces Covenant and provides good quality signposting and guidance.
- 12** The University is currently working towards launching an online version of the Bridging Course in conjunction with the County Council. As part of a blended format this will complement in-person classes in a new development providing a

much desired flexible learning model suitable for serving military personnel as well as those from Afghanistan and Ukraine who have worked alongside or served their own country. Once completed the course will be widely promoted.

Recommended

That the report be noted.

Jacky Pendleton

West Sussex County Council Armed Forces Champion

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Background papers

None